

# **ARE NIGHTMARES PROSE OR POETRY?**

*The Posthumous Poems Of*

**Marty Christensen**

Author of My Flashlight Was Attacked By Bats



**Paintings By Marty Christensen**

**Lorna Viken Books**

**Portland, Oregon 97217**

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*by*

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Casey Bush who is a Portland, Oregon, poet and Senior Editor of *The*

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## Are Nightmares Prose or Poetry? by Marty Christensen

Introduction by Casey Bush

Marty Christensen (1942-2012) was Oregon's finest surrealist poet. His poetry mixed observations of a world both mysterious and beautiful with cries of inner rage and pain that were expressed in short and often humorous stanzas. Descended from a long line of Lutheran ministers, Marty believed in God but couldn't repress his impulse to criticize the deity's performance, writing poems like arrows aimed towards the Heavens.

I first met Marty in the late 1970s at the Long Goodbye poetry open mic where he held court with the likes of Walt Curtis, Katherine Dunn and John Shirley. I remember him best from a reading ten years later at the Laughing Horse Bookstore, when it was on NW 23rd Avenue. There, Marty read poems accompanied by a slide show of his paintings, one poem per painting. The combination of image and spoken word was both dazzling and dizzying. In addition to being a poet, Marty was also a prolific artist and produced over 400 paintings.

This posthumous volume was edited by his wife Lorna, collected in the year since his death. The manuscripts were patiently retrieved from shoeboxes in the closet, papers stuffed into kitchen drawers, and transcribed from recordings on cassette tape. A combination of all nine Greek muses put together, Lorna shared a long life with Marty and now serves as his literary executor. Decades ago their love was documented by a few lines cast into speckled sidewalk along the Light Rail Line on SW Yamhill between 3rd and 4th, funded by 1% for Public Art; Dante whispering into the ear of Beatrice: "You could be a jukebox. I could be a dime."



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**Photograph of William Burroughs and Marty Christensen by Clyde Keller**



DEAR READER

Thank you for opening this volume!  
I think you will discover that what you are  
about to read is not  
just another ego trip like my last book.

Someday eternity will simply vanish from the  
eyeball we live trapped on. Only last night  
some severed heads showed up on our table.  
“Please pass the Danton,” somebody  
remarked.

## THIS TIME

You, dear reader, have danced up on a lucky poem.

Right now

Look inward at a giant star!

Look outward at diminishing returns.

Then make your choice.

Just be sure that it's a good one.

My Luck has run out.

## FANCY MEETING YOU HERE

It was raining hard that horrible night  
and I was running with a pack of dogs.  
Each one of them was really me. Yet  
every hound possessed a separate personality.  
All that they shared in common was my nightmare.



## AN EXHAUSTING NIGHTMARE

Underneath a very troubled sky  
trees are shaking off their leaves  
which hundreds of us chase like  
dogs--we want to catch them in our mouths--  
that may cause an orgasm...  
At last one drifted into my jaws.  
I had run around all night for this  
vivacious moment of debauchery  
but all that happened was the trees fell.

## CRAZY WITH DESIRE

Never to have known about  
the muse at all. Strange, how  
that thought amuses me. . .

## ARE NIGHTMARES PROSE OR POETRY?

Charley Puntilla is dead, killed in action. I tried to think about him, worry it, afraid that when I fell asleep I might get into heavy weather. When I got the dream in parts, tho it was beautiful. We met in the old neighborhood & walked around together. Finally, I got the old speed surge I almost always got around the guy & started hugging him & talking:

Charley, why are you in Vietnam? You know  
I love your yellow shirt & yellow hair you  
wear. Staring off. At women who undress shades  
up. Shades on. Little Richard. Jerking off.  
That was a real source of strength. Even when I  
stripped all the clothes off your little sister  
man you had to laugh. so we fought. you started it.  
I remember that the crowd kept yelling "kill him kill him"  
but i cdn't do it. You took my right hand & put it over steam.  
that heater. stabbed me too. Rushed off in a dead faint.  
Too the hospital! Parnell he lectured me. Outside the hospital.  
As if I had not understood. then, 3 weeks later we both  
took 2 chickens, cut their heads off -- grabbed them by the necks --  
NO MEAN FEAT IN ITSELF -- & threw them thru the poor guy's window.  
We were gods, man, just divine. DIVINE. Now, it's like the time  
we tried to kill is killing us. I cdn't tell you why  
Why did I have to love Tom Bray? Now we can't even talk now  
anymore. Now we can't even talk. Now we can't talk now  
even anymore.

Charles was nowhere  
But I cd almost hear his voice!

## THE SEX LIFE OF RAGGEDY ANN

Night came, she got stopped, napping that is, woke up then, with some last images fading from her brainpan. There she is now, just emerging from between two sheets placed over a sleeping bag, unzipped and spread out over a sheet of plywood placed on a bare frame, with no mattress. A fall chill is in the room, arousing the begonias to a last, perhaps fatal blossoming. Now she has finished watering the plants, hastened to the bathroom and stands caught in a suspension between following the routine of the last few months, going out for breakfast into the warm summer morning, now a bit too cold for comfort, or turning on the oven, heating up the room. She notices at last the strands of straw obtruding from her sweaty palms and while the morning whips her half-to-death she sits there suffering unspeakably until tears finally begin to roll out of the little button eyes and soak into her soggy cheeks.

## NO MOON

Midnight, wall to wall, infinite space,  
high ceiling and a window.  
If only there had been faith enough  
to go around. Even I could have  
been a contender.

## AS FAR AS THE MUSE IS CONCERNED

The sun is a catatonic pun  
littering the firmament with adjectives.

## ALL POEMS

All poems are proposed by insane voices  
whose silent lubrications can't touch ground.

**Unsung Heroes #17 by Marty Christensen 1988**





MEETING THE GREAT ONES  
for Walt Curtis

randy asshole's  
diary is just filled  
up  
you could hold my hand  
but you are not alone  
he told it  
front & center  
then  
we were alone  
like Nanook of the North  
adrift  
upon an ice cube  
in the state of despair  
that can follow euthanasia

## FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE

The sun is warm  
& so you've paused  
to savor the pollen  
tingling on your arms.  
A desire to relax & sleep  
has almost overwhelmed you.  
Still, you aroused yourself  
& plot a calculated course. After  
all, you never ever could have  
gotten where you are today  
if you had let yourself grow weak  
those times you were allowed inside  
to spend an evening with the Queen.

## FOR HIS FIRST MASTERPIECE

Dawn and Sunset both have rosy cheeks  
which press themselves into the stratosphere.  
A glass box encloses the entire spectacle.

Friends told the artist: just leave it there  
with no logical links. No, he didn't  
acquire a big name. But he deserved one.

## THE LAST PAINTING

At first you feel overwhelmed  
by this psychedelic masterpiece  
where luminiferous light is being broadcast  
from about a country-mile inside the surface  
which looks so unstable its structure could mutate.  
Then you notice a signature has been tattooed  
on what can only be an angel's wing...

## A MAZE OF NIGHT REMAINS

a maze of night remains  
dawn whistling past  
old windows wine & now  
what i am doing  
          friends gone  
out the door without me

## THE CITY

the day, as fickle  
anyhow morning sprinkled

then noon was a breeze  
& pouring rain

now a grand rainbow spreads  
like a berserk minimalist painting  
looms above the smokescreen of the sky  
WHICH IS THE REASON I AM NEVER GOING TO DIE

## THE GYPSY

a floating leaf  
crippled by fall  
begins  
to  
crumple the air  
connected  
by a little silver wire  
to my ear  
which transmits CIA REPORTS  
upon request  
all winter nights  
from now

## THE BOUNTY HUNTER'S LEDGER

the job  
entails  
along with  
killing, writing  
all this down. How  
many coyotes  
dead today, and so  
on. Someday

100 years from now  
somebody  
is going to read in  
my ledger. They will

understand

why I am mad . . .



# A POEM IN EVERY RESPECT

a poem in every respect (what the hell's inscrutable?), from there on & on & on again, interpretations, lists extensible forever. But, the poem is apart. It fell apart. Title & poem Life & Death, & so on to the next poem.

That's Emotion

WHITMAN

out of the cradle  
endlessly rocking  
reading your poem  
wheat is pubic hair

I AM THE POET WHO  
never stops talking

i just babble on

my veins itch  
& my ears are enormous

too big  
to stuff  
into my tiny mouth

KOOL

Any deviation from rationality  
not facilitated by perception  
will be challenged instantly  
by every apprehension you possess.

But, if perception climbs on board  
distortions, like emotions, disappear.

JOSEPH CONRAD

“If I had not written in English,  
I would not have written at all.”

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I feel like a misty sponge under orders  
to chop off the sharp edges of stars and  
paste them down on butterfly brains. Sure,  
you say, why not...ha, ha. I started plotting  
this career making fishing plugs which didn't  
work at all. They scared the fish. One thang,  
like folks might say in the country, is don't  
frighten them fish. When the wood began to turn  
into a gnome beneath my knife I realized that I  
was going too far into sculpture and commenced  
to tie flies. Now I don't know where I'm at and  
have decided that it's time to talk about it.

**Marty Christensen by Charlie Walsh**



## A LIBERAL AGNOSTIC SPEAKS

If there is anyone  
I feel sorry for  
that person is an atheist.  
If only I could prove  
them either right or wrong.



## A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

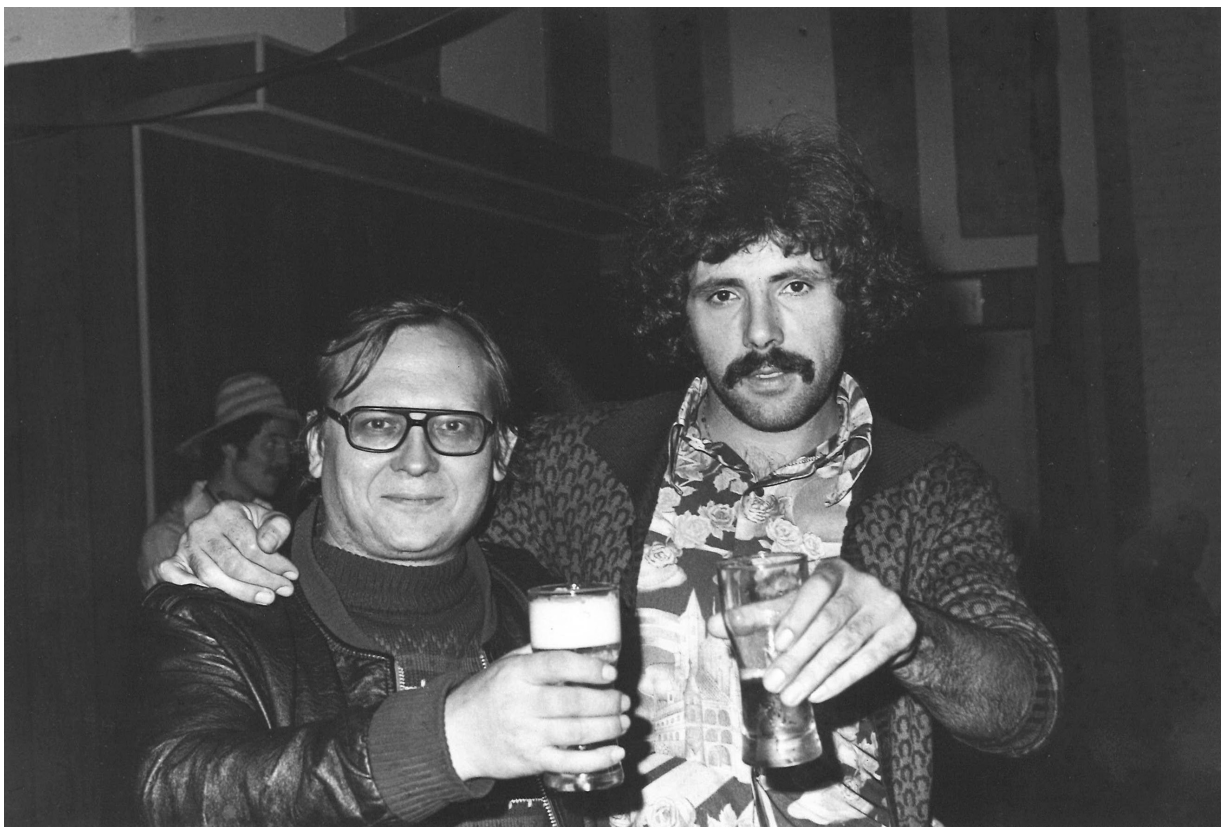
1.

Around here no one parties anymore.  
Maybe someday all of my bewildered friends  
will suddenly appear . . . drunk, stoned or maybe  
just disheveled . . . homesick pilgrims trying hard  
to find again the friendly cabaret that sadly went astray.

2.

If they do  
then I don't care  
if I do what they do when they do it.  
I could even carry back a plan or two.  
Around here no one parties that much anymore.  
The carrion presence of birds will destroy  
what still remains of second childhood  
and just leave me with a gun and no appetite  
but I will spew my last words out and live  
long enough to see them get rejected everywhere.

**Marty Christensen and George Touhouliotis owner and  
impresario of Satyricon Rock'n Roll Club**



## The Solipsist

When I dream

I sometimes dream  
about my dreams

They're almost  
like leftovers.

## EDUCATION

First, we transform  
ourselves  
into a rare  
hybrid species  
that really is  
out of this world.  
Then we must yank  
ourselves back so  
that we can become  
an equally rare  
hybrid species: one  
who prefers to remain  
still out of this world.  
Only when we try  
too hard and long  
to be heard  
are we asking  
to be returned,  
back into the world.  
And by then  
it could be too late.

## ON TURNING 44

What heresies-in-verse I'd like to write  
if that was something God deemed right.  
But let's not offend the universe tonight.

## ON TURNING FIFTY

“You have sensitive fingers  
a fine mind  
and twenty years to live.”

## SCRIPT FOR A SHORT FILM

The scene is set in a small building whose insides are painted white in their entirety except for the ten beds, five on each side of a concrete pond in which tadpoles are transformed into frogs. The beds are all painted black and so are the covers and straps which hold the ten occupants of them prisoners. These people vary greatly in age, size and color. One of them speaks: gibberish comes out.

In the next scene several people come in dressed in outfits that completely hide their identities. They attach clear plastic runways to the pond. Each one leads directly to one of the beds. A few feet before the beds a lightbulb is placed over the water runways. There the runways end and wires, hooked into the lightbulb, are extended into a switch box on the end of each bed. Everyone cranes their neck watching as tadpoles swim part way up the runways then turn back. None reaches the lightbulb. Meanwhile, tiny frogs begin to jump out of the pond and hop all over the floor.

By now, the third scene all of the entrapped people look crazy with hunger and fear. They are all screaming in different tongues none of which make any sense. But, in the fervor, one of the last tadpoles skitterishly passes a light bulb. When it lights up the door immediately opens too. The occupant of the bed is freed from restrictions. First, she looks around at the others. Then she gets up, completely naked, and bolts for the open door. When she runs through the open door she emerges into a sunny afternoon. On each side of a dusty road are many buildings set out in a straight line which leads to a highway about six blocks to the North. She runs the gauntlet. Only in the last block does she notice writing. Appearing in huge letters on the side of a building: TADPOLE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

## CAROUSELS OF PROGRESS

I used to know this guy  
named Gary Going. In 5th  
grade we were walking  
around. In circles pretty  
much. An adult  
approaches us and asks  
Gary, "Are you Going,  
mister?" "Yes I am,  
Sir. Right now." The  
gentleman said "All  
I meant was is your name  
Going?" Gary looked  
bemusedly at him and said,  
"I'm sorry, Sir.  
I thought you were a cop."



## ON TURNING SIXTY

The bells are ringing  
but the melody has disappeared.

## ALL THE LIGHTS

Our lives have  
    gotten soldered  
rather hopelessly both together  
    and apart

Two hyperventilating  
    shit birds  
who have fucked out all the lights

Two shit birds who have  
our dilemmas have  
gotten soldered  
both together  
and apart -- Like us,  
just fucked out all the lights.

U. F. O.

What we had thought  
was an approaching  
God on the horizon  
turned out to be  
parched liver  
swimming in the toilet.  
A little later on though  
a mystical blimp showed up.  
During the commotion  
it snuck in a window  
had sex with everyone  
took some photographs  
then exited  
by floating up the chimney.  
Our perspective literally vanished.  
So much so that  
while watching this cigar-shaped  
balloon making its escape  
we decided that whatever had been  
almost left behind  
may somehow have caused  
a reverberation which was  
so suggestive, even magical, that  
what would be remembered later  
might end up arbitrarily arranged  
honed down into an iconic vision  
which could  
once it had been assimilated  
just drift off into the Heavens and disintegrate.

## COMPOSER AND INTERPRETER

In my fantasy that I am Chopin  
you play Paderewski. We meet  
we percolate, forgetful fingers  
glide above glissandos. We wander  
together inside mad musical displays  
setting new social standards unexplored  
before in these climes where orchards  
glimmer interrupting our cliches. Poland  
twinkles like a magic lantern in a dream.

## BREEZES

The smell of the first wind  
was devoid of content  
and had no abstract context whatsoever.  
However, the odor of the second wind  
did have an abstract context  
which was magnificently filled with content.  
The third wind even made a flag flap briskly.  
But after all these breezes finally died down  
we just felt more horny than we had the night before.



**Natural Process by Marty Christensen 1986**





## THE VORTEX

the structure i have no desire  
to explain  
it is composed of units  
palpable in the harsh smoggy night

but notice the vortex of immediate apprehension  
so absolutely clear

that rises from the television set. it is a take  
from an antique movie, a tale told by an idiot,  
a devotee of charles manson is explaining that the  
president of the united states is just a robot  
& the network reporter sticks his microphone down  
collected for judgement

madness leaking from her lovely lips  
madness burns outside me in the oregon fields  
madness in the drive to protest anything at all  
the logic

rides around an empty auditorium  
like a palladium of dust

## APOLITICAL MANDALA

Visualize term limits as a bronzed spider-web.  
Snakes swim outward from its center.  
When they reach the edges they break and start to scream.  
If they push on after that they burst  
like an appendix or get shredded into dust.  
Ending anyone's career is horrible: But  
it could help us keep them looking almost honest.



## BUT, WAS I A GENIUS OR A NUT?

Sometimes, even when I was just a freshman  
I could find a strange poem in the library  
and somewhat tremulously words would rise  
like drops of mercury before my eyes.  
I used to ponder aloud  
if somewhere in the furthest stacks  
there might be a false image that explained me.

## ALMOST ANOTHER EPITAPH

Whenever I pass on  
remember this; Nobody  
walks out on me.

## AN 80'S DREAM

I go into this fancy bar. I am sober, dressed in a sports coat and tie, and very nervous. There are two other guys at the bar and a very well-dressed waitress. The customers are slickly dressed young guys in suits.

We start talking about alcohol. The guy at the end of the bar mentions the name of a very expensive quasi-bourbon. I say I've never tasted it and he says, "Hell, there's no time like the present" and orders me a fifth of it. I smell it, tell him it smells good, and wait for a glass. "Just drink it from the fifth", he says. I do it and it is utterly terrific. "Well, that's the end of the 70's", he says.

## ART PROJECT

Do Pencils: use  
machine in basement--  
& write poems, etc.  
on the pencils.

Buy perhaps a box  
(wooden would be nice) of  
about 30 pencils. Write  
titles, i.e. They Even Let A  
Crazy Guy Have Fun At The  
Party--different one for every  
pencil.

Exhibit them in Box.

## WAITING TO GET INTO HEAVEN

A teenager wearing headphones  
has just stepped on my dick.  
When the line moves  
I notice it is bleeding.  
Who should I speak to  
& what can I tell them?

## ADREAM

I dreamt my mother told me  
and I think she told me true  
you better love somebody  
who's much better at Love than you.

## FAR BACK IN THE MOUNTAINS

Melancholy, I take down  
my solitary lute:

tuning its soggy strings  
one breaks  
partially removing my left eye.

## APHORISM

most people never gaze on beauty bare  
because their minds get too messed up



MEMORIES CAN  
INADVERTENTLY CAUSE TWITCHES

Sukiyaki Sam, he got it  
first with chopsticks.  
I discovered mine  
painting crosses  
on spider's backs  
with an airbrush.  
The difference  
between enlightenment  
and sanctification  
is becoming more and more  
just another daddy-longlegs with delusions.



At Risk by Marty Christensen 1986





## IMAGINATION IS EVERYTHING

On a blank page  
there are no groupies.  
Words look awkward  
irregardless of fine printing  
or calligraphy. They mean  
absolutely nothing. If God  
were truly present there  
would be no Bible.  
Heaven does not have a Library.  
A blank page has no groupies.

Books would not exist  
unless there was a God.  
On a blank page  
there are no groupies.

## THE SATSANG CALL IT SUGMAD

There are so many voids and emanations:  
the calm nothingness of Buddha  
the painful emptiness of Christ  
and the manic laser leap and lose it  
I still get from pressed-rat-acid flashbacks.

## CONDITIONS

Once you get used to the taste  
it starts to taste like garlic

Trying to sustain illusions  
while maintaining my habits

Both headlights are catatonic  
but the tires seem just fine.

## DREAMS

I dream first that I am sick, with the shits. Even before this I have felt intense dread. But it's not just diarrhea. I feel that I am incoherent. That I cannot explain anything, i.e., any subject rationally and understandably to anyone, so I try to talk to other people. As soon as I do my dread and constipation wither back to discomfort. "I guess I couldn't have been endlessly and completely full of shit" I say complacently to no one in particular.

I am in the Army or someplace quite like it. They aren't sure if it's the Army or not either. By "they" I mean the Officers I ask. One finally asks us all to stand in formation. I try to but continue talking -- telling him I don't know how to follow his directions -- and going on about whether he is asking us questions telling us what to do, or maybe the whole thing is a joke. The situation becomes embarrassing. I ask him finally if I will be judged for my behavior in this incident or drill. "I don't know" he says "it was conceived of as an experiment."

Finally, I have voluntarily gone to some kind of cult-like weekend venture, that advertises God-knows-what through training to magical meditation. There are charts hanging up with ink drawings on them. One is an old chest of drawers with the drawers all pulled out. This, the instructor tells me is, what you can become through meditation and obedience to our ways and methods. "But," he reassuringly adds, "you can always lie to yourself about anything and everything. We all do. There is no right or wrong." I wonder, walking for miles around the huge campground in the middle of the forest, if I am free to go or not. If freedom is still open, an open option for me. I really don't know if I want to take more pills. But I think that I know more now than I did. Enough that I should find the friend I came in with and tell her not to become like I am. Don't believe them I say to myself.

## EACH ACCORDING TO THEIR NEED

Pricks and pussies flopped on the floor like dying fish and the walls literally had ears. But that wasn't why I did what I did. The real reason was I felt I needed to keep my sanity. Afraid to even look in the toilet

I pissed in a drawer. It filled up quickly once I started and I had to open the next door down and keep pissing hoping that my need would dry up before I ran out of drawers to fill. Then the owner of the house walked in and asked me what on earth I thought that I was doing.

## ANCIENT PHYSICS

Karma may be generated by the most instantaneous of misapprehensions. Yesterday I suspected that my rear-end might be having a heart attack. Now the asshole wants to talk about it.



I AM ONLY HUMAN  
the air is thin up here  
almost too thin  
still rigorous walking  
and still not too nervous

if only they could see me  
why would anybody care?  
I look at the watch in my pocket  
does it know where I am? No

I am the greatest navigator  
of the seven seas  
I just summon up the breeze  
and set my face windward  
and then the windows break  
so much am I in tune with the bluster  
I can muster  
the text from the log of records.

DEAR AUNT POLLY

When we met I told you  
I was quite unique -- always  
lurking about with a moon-doggy  
look. Now I have been gone for days  
wandering around in the woods  
pretending to myself I'm either drunk or stoned.  
Actually about the only thing I am is wide awake.  
All I really truly feel is a little crazy.  
Out here there aren't any precious stones.  
Gold Fever is the only reason I have not  
come home to stay.

## ROUGH STUFF

A bad maverick hiding out in his cabin  
unbuttons his pants. When next we  
meet the shoes are off and one thing  
more: the baseball cap. Now there arises  
from the south a cry of sick ferocity.  
That is the cry of the Loon at midnight.  
How the cowboy hates to hear that screech!  
Going to bed he leaves the rest  
of his clothes on in case of an emergency.

## THE WALL

Thanks to a multitude of red roses  
it was both the best and  
worst of all possible arrangements.  
The rocks suggested dying dreams  
made out of glued down moonbeams.  
People walking in the garden blushed.



**Revisionism by Marty Christensen 1987**





## INNOCENCE

Even the most friendly fish in this aquarium  
are highly edible. Some of them  
even look a little bit like  
they may have been nibbled on already.  
Their eyes are twice the size of raw egg yolks.

## THE LAST TOWN DRUNK

Names perish  
but celebrity status endures.

## JUST LAST NIGHT

I dreamt I was hurling a discus  
across a lake made out of mush.  
Waking up I found out  
for political reasons my girlfriend  
doesn't know if she should visit me.  
I put the blinds up more often now  
and today, I am going outside  
to sporadically pull weeds  
and put my hands on my chin  
pretending to plan a course-of-action.



## DUST FALLS ON THE DREAMERS

Yes,I have met a Saint or two.  
They are simple-minded people specialists.  
But the Hermit bears a burden too.  
Caught in a searchlight he just barks out Lies.

## STICKING TOGETHER

Our family has always been a great one for sticking together through thick and thin and somehow always coming up on top. Three of the girls are married now but their new husbands fitted right in with our outfit and everything kept growing splendidly. To avoid the monotony of an unchanging life we've always tried to change our lives completely every five or six years. After every business venture, whether it happened to be a miniature golf course or a furniture store, what we would do is all take a vacation together and during the trip plan our new project. That's what we did a couple of years ago on the beaches of Hawaii. Dad looked up at the sun and declared: Why, that oozing orb looks just like a big, fried egg. Why don't we start a restaurant next time out? Soon all the girls were reading cookbooks and dad and the fellows looked into the business aspects while mom designed the actual interior complete with all the details. Just four months later we had opened a place in the bustling Northwest amidst the blare of a high school band and the sizzling fat of fondue hamburgers with all the trimmings.

## AFTER A CHILDHOOD IN VAUDEVILLE

Sometimes before a gig  
Buddy Rich would ask the bass player  
if he could walk in front of him and talk.

Then he repeated what he had just heard  
word for word.

## SLEEP

Sleep may be not only the best  
thing yet discovered but educational as well.  
Tonight I will approach it wearing a bow-tie.

## THE NEW SURREALISM

To become accepted as an artist  
one must know how to prepare aardvark.

## MIRACLE

Just one smudge-pot  
saved the grapes  
but left a puffy mark  
on the hand of the fool  
who lit the damn thing.

## A RULE OF THUMB

A few smudge-pots  
warm the orchard  
but too many  
fry the grapes!

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

What registers immediately  
seldom goes away. How many  
Russians thought they chain-smoked  
just because they simply loved the earth?



## THE INEXTINGUISHABLE SPIRIT

The enlightened soul does not know  
that it is destined to vanish  
in a few years  
with the complete  
destruction of God's vineyard.

Taped down happily to the dashboard  
like a stable but protracted omen  
it finds absolute calmness  
in the midst of cement - dusty dreams,  
solace in a finalized bewilderment.

## CONFESSION

I am really a very nice guy.  
But I try to sound vicious  
because Life is so rough it scares me.

## OBSERVATION

Day leaks slowly  
away as water  
drains quietly out  
of the bath. It  
splashes in  
then leaves  
through a small hole.

## RUSH MORE

Neither Oscar Levant or Ted Berrigan  
invented amphetamine but they both  
used a lot of it.

Lenny Bruce and Neal Cassady are  
two other guys who yakked it up  
a lot.

And, lest we forget  
what about poor  
Delmore Schwartz?

## IN THE SUBURBS

Our feelings are no longer bracketed  
by utterly immovable doubts.  
We simply have to buy this house  
even though I  
am not totally content.  
Absorption in nature  
is rupturing my nervous system.  
Tonight the moon  
looks like a disintegrating hairball.  
But seen from afar, the city  
looks like it is burning  
its garbage that is my brain.

## RELATIVITY

sex in the morning is just  
like sex at night  
except you have a hangover.



**Narcissus by Marty Christensen 1986**





## IMAGING

Slow, impatient: are  
these two words in  
contradiction?

Not if you  
try walking backwards.



## PREFERENCE

Of all my fabulous followers  
my favorites by far  
are those whose lips move when they read.

## DEPRESSION

If one looks starkly at depression  
nothing really stands out.  
How could it? Oh, forget that  
I brought up the idea.

## PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH

One would have thought my mind  
would have been tenderized by grief.  
But I just continue ego-tripping, sneering  
over the odd toy my Life has become!  
If my emotions seep away in shame,  
only one soul will remain  
still standing stiffly at Love's altar  
and it could start to feel stupid  
and drop dead...

## THE WAY I WANT MY FUNERAL PERFORMED

All I want said over me is  
well, he had his strengths and weaknesses  
preferred the weaknesses  
at least that's what he always said.

The body shall be lowered, in the  
missionary position, into just poured  
cement. Then, when that is done say  
it's not a bad position when you think about it.

## A POSSIBLE FLAW

I still could be too paranoid. As I  
suffered delirium tremens  
even God's presence alarmed me.

“JE EST UN AUTRE”

We can't all be like  
Arthur Rimbaud. To a  
cyclops an I is just  
an eye. Pluck me out  
before I go farther.

## NUDE MEDITATIONS

All my plants look sick

But I still keep the window and the blinds firmly shut

So mostly do the other folks

## FIRST ENCOUNTERS

Hearing imaginary voices  
is like being startled  
by someone typing only worse.

### SAD BUT TRUE

Water seeks out  
its own level  
unaware that many times  
the main problem  
is unstable temperatures.

Years before television and stereo  
there was a monaural universe of noise.  
I still sing some old songs  
once my closest companions  
until radio singing became  
not just sounds but language to me.  
There was also a large woman  
who wore a beret and was the landlady.

A white dove dove  
into a drove of other doves  
right in front of us. Pa fainted  
and the rest of us, all five girls  
and Mum and Alfalfa, just stood there  
like a basketball team that has a  
catatonic coach. This had been  
our very first encounter with the void.



## STORM

For Lorna

withering saliva  
on the slow way home  
thru a blizzard of glass  
\*

grouse sights pigeon  
in the zoo. how did you  
do? me, who knows? sad  
hyena song outside coo  
\*

ripped out  
opening

now  
no stars  
no winds

so deep  
inside her

## NIGHTCLUB

standard music.  
one-way windows  
its always  
midnight  
wall to wall.  
for dinner  
there is  
usually  
some champagne soup.  
for entertainment  
nothingness...  
outside  
a footprint might  
sometimes appear.  
no problem there.  
like lonely dolphins  
we have radar  
to detect and  
even hypnotize  
whatever darling  
spectres may arrive.

## GARDEN OF EVIL

Gary Cooper explains to Susan Hayward:

a cross doesn't have to be  
a horrible thing to see. It  
can be beautiful: and everybody has one.

DEGREES  
OF DOUBT

To identify yourself  
with God  
whether you're a monk  
or plagued by schizophrenia  
is sad but understandable.

To believe  
as Kenneth Rexroth  
claimed to  
that the world  
has been saved  
by meditation practitioners  
time and again  
without believing in God  
is sort of egotistical.

Similarly  
Romanticism turns  
into Fascism  
with Ezra Pound  
for God's sake.  
Aren't the Cantos really prose?

WHILE HIS SCUMMY INNER PRINCIPLES  
cursed the rotten little girl  
who talked to the spirits  
he still knew goddamn well  
she would do anything he wanted.

## A CLASSICAL APPROACH

We built some fires for you,  
dotted them along the ocean's edge.

Now we look to see  
your shadow float  
enormously  
above, within, upon  
our Lilliputian sea.

## I KEEP TELLING MYSELF

your poems are like prisons  
just get in and get out fast

but then I remember  
that the poems were only  
visiting

that he's just uhh,  
well...charged

and anyway I am changing  
my whole life.

## HERE IN THE EDGAR ALLAN POE ROOM

for Phil Meehan

It is midnight wall to wall. There are  
many infinite spaces, a high ceiling  
and an open window (out of which  
imaginary voices spill). I presume  
that my mind likes getting jerked around  
by the random ravings of a sentimental void.



## THE SIREN

Something was intensely alive  
when i did at last get up

I wasn't quite awake  
but it sure as Hell was...

One scorching afternoon  
bereft of wind  
they got acquainted.  
Even before  
night gently fell  
her limpid songs had  
sweetly sponged  
his sweating spirit down.  
But, the pity is  
just as dawn broke  
his dreams exploded  
victims of her voice  
which was already  
howling to get out the door.

DECEMBER 13

Yes, today is Friday.  
I don't think she knows it yet.  
The important thing for a poet  
is finding his or her own voice.  
After that  
you can turn a mature product out.  
Critics sometimes will go back  
to the early, groping, shifting -voices  
period when searching for clues  
to the miracle of this type of awakening.

## EXISTENCE

In this eyeball we're trapped on  
like a spot of blood in its yolk  
becoming all unglued is at last  
the separation of the parts wherein we muddle  
without hesitation. Like apples  
on a bare tree in winter  
harsh winds tossing at the fruit  
frozen rain spilling off the cusp  
almost anything perversely lighted  
entertains this wholeness of existence.

## BY WAY OF A CONFESSION

I might as well admit it: Right from the get go,  
years ago, I have been drowning deep in Love with La La.  
(La La was the codename Lorna liked to call herself  
many years before I met her.) I, myself, will  
sometimes call her La La to this day. Her mother,  
Gladys, was called Ga Ga by her cohorts a whole  
generation prior. Now, as her mother lies  
stretched out flat on her back  
wounded by a swollen and infected foot  
I herein record  
if only as a footnote to our anxiety and pain  
that I remain in Love with both La La and Lorna  
not to mention my good pals Ga Ga and Gladys  
and all the open faces in the spaces in-between.



Lorna Christensen

## OUR HUMBLE LEGACY

We were running like rats  
until we started  
dying like pigs and  
all this time we were  
hornier than mules  
and a whole lot more  
intense. We had been  
made differently than  
most but were, by no  
means, either as odd  
or exalted as others  
who had been  
profoundly Blest.

## MANIFESTO

I should have been found  
To be insane the day I was born.  
But unfortunately they did not have  
the Technology. So, I was forced  
to stumble through the first grade and all that.

## MY FRIENDS

when i was asked to speak at the hereafter banquet which we all attend especially with reference myself i asked myself what after all do you have to say to anyone at this stage & of course i wonder what is happening a lot. that's what i want to center on in this discussion the question of what is happening. we all think about it a lot. some more than others perhaps. perhaps not. who the fuck cares. i mean we all know that there is a dark side to life. why dwell on it. very possibly you won't be able to handle it anyway. even if you do & find what you are seeking how do you know you weren't better off before. take care.



STILL

As someone who writes poetry  
I feel that I do owe society myself.

AFTER FINISHING A SIX MONTHS' CREATIVE PLAN  
ONLY GETTING DRUNK ONCE THE WHOLE TIME

I'm just jogging  
with my pants down  
still aiming at the world.

## AFTERWORD BY WALT CURTIS

I persuaded Lorna Christensen--wife, dauntless and loyal publisher, love of his life-- in what order?--that Marty Christensen the human being needs to be written about. She agreed. So I'll give it my best shot. After all, he and I met at the Rainbow Inn in 1970. Probably over a pitcher of beer. We would drink 1000s of pitchers in the next 40 years.

Once you met Marty, in high form, you could never forget him. He wouldn't let you, anyway. He had to have the last say. And why not? Marty could converse for hours about jazz, abstract expressionist art, American poetry, and the literary scene. The politics of the gallery and grant awards, chosen by committee because the work was innocuous and nonthreatening to the bourgeois public.

My friend Marty was always a bohemian, a true wit, a brilliant and intense talker like Lenny Bruce. To know him was to never forget him. The poet Marty Christensen is the most unique personality and person I ever spent time with in Portland. On many dark, rainy, gloomy nights--in dim open-mike venues like The Long Goodbye, The Mediterranean Tavern, Club Satyricon--we discussed debated, argued the nature of cultural reality.

I often relented. Marty could wear you down. After all, he played football at Astoria H.S. Besides, 90 percent of the time he was correct. Only 10 percent of the time was he slightly paranoid. I told you my remarks would be personal. Why not, after spending 40 years on planet Earth with a hip consciousness? What a privilege, what a dialog between rival poetic friends. Christensen shares in splendid hallucinatory poems the inner personal nature of his psyche.

Reader, you are lucky. Marty didn't always like publicity. The art scene. The critics in the newspapers. He stayed at home! What a laugh! For a poet of his caliber, the world is his oyster. He'd be at home in San Francisco, New York City, Paris or Rome. He could be cosmopolitan. D. Alan Jones, art critic for *Arts Magazine* and *Galleries Magazine*, and locally *Odysseus* magazine, and co-author of The Art Dealers, got Marty an exhibit of his paintings in a New York gallery. He went. Hooray!

Who actually admired Marty Christensen the poet and the person? So many of us. The two go hand in glove! Some powerful and perceptive folks. Ken Kesey, Gus Van Sant, Katherine Dunn, myself--many of the Portland poets who ever met him and conversed. They knew. This was an original guy. Ordinary working class bar guys were proud to know his friendship. Christensen was never an elitist. He hung out with the sports bar crowd and the art museum one. He preferred the former.

Lorna and Marty are looking over my shoulder. I have to speed it up. The reader wouldn't know how much Christensen was lionized. A little homework. Mark

Christensen, relative only through marriage, devoted a third of his unauthorized biography of Ken Kesey--Acid Christ, Schaffner Press-- to Marty. Of course, it was upsetting to Marty and Lorna, Personal stuff, nobody wants their lives in the public domain. However, Mark really cared about them. It's an intriguing take on the acid era in American life, the sixties and seventies.

Marty stars. Both Faye and Ken Kesey were comfortable and close with Marty and Lorna. Of course, those 1970's days are gone. I am the archivist. On Valentine's Day 1975, we had a wonderful warming trip to Pleasant Hill with Kesey. I tape-recorded and typed an 18-page transcript. Kesey was fun. Marty was perceptive and fun. We had hamburgers and whiskey, and talked about Venusians, UFO's, Wilhelm Reich, ley lines, reversal of the poles, and the burning of the library at Alexandria.

I am sorry you weren't there. But existential reality is what it is. I miss Ken Kesey and Marty Christensen so much. I don't know who to talk to. They were brothers bonded in acid, literature, and soul. We were always welcome at the Pleasant Hill barn home. You had to be there. It was magical. I don't want you to feel envious. I was lucky. Kesey and Christensen were magical together and separately. They enjoyed each other's company. Smoking a joint or not.

One person is missing. George Touhouliotis. The owner and impresario who loved art, poetry, and rock and roll. The Greek owner of the Satyricon Club. Mike Lastra, the filmmaker, is doing a documentary of 25 years of the club Satyricon. Poets were part of that. Doug Spangle, Casey Bush, David Boardman, Leanne Gabel, so many voices. Oh my Gawd, I almost forgot "Bad George" Conner! George the Greek realized Wednesday night poetry gave a lot of free publicity to Satyricon.

Earlier, poets were radicals and political, anti-Vietnam war at Reuben's 5 on Jefferson St. Peace activist Michael Paul McCusker (he was at Marty's funeral in Astoria. I wanted to open the coffin.), spastic Arthur Honeyman, John Bartels, Mike Marsh, Ed Edmo, Asian traveler Marjorie Sharp. Marjorie claims "Marty and Lorna are the most monogamous couple I have ever known." The truth. It was a hot literary scene back then, and Marty Christensen was in the center of it, willing or not. He shunned attention. Attention made him anxious.

My remarks are not personal enough, Too elegiac! Greek word, Greek friend. George of the Satyricon loved Marty "past all idolatry." Marty loved him back. They spent hours, days, years together getting 86ed out of stupid bars. Satyricon being one of them! After 25 years George the Greek had dealt with so many drunks, bands, druggies, stoned musicians, artists and egomaniacal poets (meaning me) and poseurs. Gawd, what a job! Well, Marty cheered him up, made him laugh out loud. When they were together, it was a duo made in heaven. The Greek saying goes, "A true friend is a gift from God."

Okay, so--We'd celebrate my Fourth of July birthday in the 1970's and until recently. Today I hate fireworks and "The Star-Spangled Banner." "Bombs bursting in air."

Imperial bullshit! Christensen was never an overtly political poet, but he knew the score. Read between the lines.

We went to Woodburn--why? on my birthday-- so-called Independence Day. Marty and Lorna, George and myself in my red Rambler. We drank vodka and had a watermelon. Needless to say-- it was a helluvan adventure. We smashed the watermelon over the hood of the car, and someone puked out the side window. The cops didn't get us. It was a typical moment with Marty, George, and me when drinking.

Dear reader, you need to know--Christensen loved the Oregon outdoors. Marty was a true fisherman. When we were young, in the 1970's we drove all around the countryside. In my mind's eye, I have black and white photos. We took a trip up the Clackamas River to North Fork Reservoir. I see Marty on a log boom dangling his line in the water. Calm and contented. I see Lorna, like a river goddess emerging from the Clackamas at High Rocks with an inner tube in her arms. Marty often sat on the bank, absorbing the river.

What a sensitive and intellectual person Marty was. His poetry shows that. We live in a mad, mad, mad world. Our society, our nation state denies the current perilous planetary condition. Perhaps his poetic sensibility is prophetic of our times. Probably Marty would disagree with me. He always did. Christensen's poetry takes us up to the zone of no-return, whether we like it or not. We have to face it.

Of all the Portland poets, including myself, Marty Christensen at his best--is the best, the most original, obsessive and refined. Marty always had style. To conclude, Lorna placed the Clyde Keller photo of Marty and Burroughs together at the 1976 Poetic Hoohaw. They are brothers of consciousness and drink. I editorialize too much. Norman Mailer wrote William S. Burroughs is the one American writer "possessed by genius." I say Marty Christensen is the only Portland poet "possessed by genius."

Walt Curtis



